

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 9, line 5 with the following amended paragraph:

[0027] The upper surface of the suction separating tool 22 constitutes an suction plane 22a which vacuum-sucks the sheet 5 in its contact therewith. The suction plane 22a has a plurality of linear sucking grooves 22b which penetrate through the upper surface of the suction separating tool 22 to communicate with an inner hole 21a of the supporting shaft portion 21. Suction members 24 made of a porous material such as a sintering material having a larger number of pores are ascendably/descendably fit in the sucking grooves 22b, respectively. These suction members 24 are coupled at their lower ends by a coupling member [25] 25a. The coupling member 25a is connected to a shaft member 25b which extends vertically downward.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 8 with the following amended paragraph:

[0031] Referring to Figs. 4A and 4B, an explanation will be given of the shape of the sucking grooves 22 formed in the suction plane 22a. As seen from [[Fig. 4]] Fig. 4A, four rows of sucking grooves 22b each having a width of B and a length of L are formed. The adjacent sucking grooves are separated from each other by one of boundary zones 22d. No protrusion is provided within each of the sucking grooves 22b so that the warping/deformation of the sheet 5 when the sheet is sucked is not hindered.